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As they walked back toward the stream, Kate picked up the stool and carried it with her and set it down right next to the bank while Silas once again stepped out into the water and began to cast. He glanced over his shoulder. "So, Kate... I was wondering what you do when you're not rolling cars down the mountainside."

He did not see her stick out her tongue before she replied. "I sell drugs."

His head snapped around and she began to stutter. "Not like that, I work for a pharmaceutical company. I take medications around to drug stores and doctors' offices and try to encourage them to buy and prescribe our stuff."

Silas laughed and shook his head. "Well, glad you clarified that. Did you have to go to school to learn that?"

She found herself admiring the form of him casting once again. "I went to college in Los Angeles, and then I went on to get a master's in business administration. I caught on to the job pretty quickly, and it pays pretty good. I really liked it until I got transferred out here, and I can't stand my new boss."

She waited for him to reply, but he simply cast once again. "So, Silas, what about you?"

He shrugged as his eyes searched the water for signs of the rise of a trout. "I never went to college. I turned down a college basketball scholarship and went into the Marines instead. I spent six years in the Marines, the last three working on those big trucks they carry troops around in.

"I really liked that, but I decided that it really wasn't where I belonged. I decided to leave before I ended up in some kind of a combat situation where I may have some ethical qualms about what I was doing. I don't want it to sound like I think I'm better than anyone else, or that I was trying to avoid the nastiness of it all, but I found myself getting a little conflicted about taking part in a war.

"When my time was up, I got a job working for the state maintaining things like dump trucks and heavy equipment. And that is where I truly belong. I like money as much as the next person, but I'm not going to make it my goal in life to see how much of it I can earn.

"Things have happened in my life that have convinced me that you have to decide for yourself what has meaning. For me, enjoying my work is major."

Kate leaned forward and rested her elbows on her knees. "So, you could've gone to college? You sound like a smart man. You could really have made something of yourself."

As soon as the words had escaped her lips, those lips were covered with the fingertips of both hands, and her face was burning in embarrassment. That hurt look on Silas' face made her want to crawl into a hole somewhere. "Oh, Silas, I'm so sorry I said that. I didn't mean to be... I'm so sorry."

He stopped fishing for a moment and faced her, silent at first. "You mentioned earlier that you did not like being transferred here, and that you did not like your boss. The only positive thing you had to say about your job was that it paid well. Is that going to bring you happiness?"

Her face burned even warmer. "I guess I have never really thought of it like that. Silas, once again..."

He shook his head and turned back toward the middle of the stream. "Forget about it. We all have the right to be who we are." He began to cast once again. "I guess it's differences between us that makes life interesting. Just forget about it."

Whatever anxiety she had been feeling before, it was now rushing over her in a torrent. The remorse she felt was unlike any she had felt for as long as she could remember. She had just insulted a man who may well have been the most decent fellow she had met in a long time.

She could feel that her lower lip was trembling once again, but it took her a moment longer to realize that she was crying. And when she began wiping the tears away with both hands, it prevented her from seeing that Silas had turned to look at her. When she lowered her hands, she was startled to see him standing next to her, water dripping down his legs.

He knelt down next to her and placed his hand on her knee. "I want you to forget that even happened. Please, Kate... I want for us just make the best of this. I want to look back on this trip as a handful of days where I got to enjoy some really great fishing in a very special place.

"Please understand, I don't think that you are a mean person. You've been under a lot of stress today, so I want you to calm down. After all, a guy camping out along the river to fish can't hardly complain about a beautiful redhead appearing out of the blue."

He gave her knee a reassuring squeeze, and she placed her hand on top of his and held it tightly. He stood up and brushed the hair out of her eyes, then patted her on the shoulder and walked back into the stream to resume fishing.

If it had not been for the nervousness that was still roiling her, she probably would have been hypnotized while watching Silas fishing. He seemed to have this constant pattern: cast the line forward, whip it back, repeat the process, then the third time allow the lure to settle onto the water.

As the time went by, she was transfixed by how many fish he caught, mesmerized by the look on his face each time he did so. If it had not been for the tension she was feeling, it would have been one of the most enjoyable times she had spent since moving to Montana, watching him with great pleasure as late afternoon turned into evening, and the sky began to darken as the sun set behind the mountains.

He finally stepped out from the water, then extended his hand to her to help her up from the short stool. It seemed to be a mutual feeling that they wanted their hands to stay clasped, but they simultaneously released each other and walked toward the tent.

Silas knelt down in front of the tent, unzipped the flap and reached inside. He pulled out a small white roll of paper and handed it to her. "We'll keep this right at the foot of my sleeping bag, so we know where it is." She blushed and nodded, took several pieces and walked behind the tent, out to where the concealing bushes grew.

When she returned, Silas handed her two rectangular white foil packets. "These are energy bars in case you get hungry. The wrappers are biodegradable, so just leave them in the tent, and I will either burn or bury them tomorrow to conceal the scent.

"It's going to get very chilly very soon, so you might want to go ahead and get inside the sleeping bag. It's very warm, so you should be quite comfortable."

With a sweeping gesture of his hand, he motioned for her to go inside the tent, then took his own walk out behind the shrubs. Assuming she may be settling into the sleeping bag, he spent a few

minutes walking around the campsite, making sure that everything was in order.

Finally satisfied that it was time for what was probably going to be an awkward and strange night to begin, he grabbed hold of the rifle and crawled inside the tent and zipped the flaps closed.

He turned his head to see that Kate was not only in the sleeping bag, but had it held tightly up to her chin. Then he noticed that her blouse and jeans were laying folded on top of her. He had been tempted to recommend she sleep that way but did not want to sound as if he was suggesting something untoward.

She suddenly spoke slowly and cautiously. "I could never bring myself to do this kind of thing. The camping out in the wilderness, I mean."

Silas looked at her and smiled warmly. "Do you lie to yourself often?"

Her head snapped toward him. "What do you mean by that?"

He tilted his head and smiled. "You are obviously a very bright and ambitious woman. From the small amount of time we have been together, I get the impression you're capable of quite a bit. So when you say that you could not cope with a situation like this, I think you're selling yourself short. Something tells me you could be much more resourceful than you're giving yourself credit for. That's what I mean when I ask if you are lying to yourself."

He was surprised to see a hint of a smile. "Perhaps I should say that I'm not very adaptable to things I'm not accustomed to."

He returned the smile. "Could any of that be stubbornness?"

She winced. "I get your point, Silas."

"Don't you find any sense of adventure in taking a risk now and then, Kate?"

"Not really. I like to have everything buttoned down and in order. I still don't understand your desire to come out and do this kind of thing."

"You see, Kate, for me that is part of the exhilaration of it all. I don't really expect anything to happen to me coming to a place like this, but I do get kind of a thrill from knowing that I have taken myself away from where everything is safe and secure."

He reached to the back of the tent and held up a flashlight so that she could see where it was at. "Maybe if you know where this is at, it may help you to relax."

"Is it that obvious that I'm nervous about this entire situation?"

He nodded slowly. "And that's understandable. But all you have to do is follow my directions and remember what I tell you to do and not to do. And then in a couple of days, you will be back on your way to Billings. Okay?"

She sighed loudly. "Okay."

He nodded warmly. "Now try to get some sleep." Then he reached into the backpack which was sharing his half of the narrow, cramped tent with him and pulled out a small plastic package from which he withdrew what looked like a tightly folded silver cloth. He could not move at all without bumping and pressing against her.

She watched with interest as he unfolded the piece of fabric, and then unfolded it some more until it had turned into a very thin but full-size blanket. He began to spread it over his body, then looked over at Kate and shrugged. "I guess this is time to say good night. Hope you sleep well." He heard her mutter something he could not understand as he turned onto his right side and pulled the survival blanket tightly around his large torso.

Something about seeing him bed down for the night caused Kate's already raging anxiety to spiral. Now she was not only afraid of being out in the wilderness, and still embarrassed by her inadvertent insult earlier in the day, suddenly she felt inexplicably lonely. It made no sense to her, as they were squeezed against each other.

A thought came to her, but she told herself that she should not. No, she needed to deal with her fears in a more logical manner.

But then she cast logic aside. Once she was certain that Silas was asleep, she slowly unzipped the side of the sleeping bag, and slithered out of it, making certain that her knees were not resting near the trigger of the rifle that rested between them, although she knew her knee was not likely to make the trigger activate. She slightly brushed his butt with the back of her hand, having to dispel the temptation to give it a mild grab to see if it was as firm as she imagined it would be.

Looking back and forth between the head of the already sleeping Silas and the top of the backpack that rested at his feet, she began to feel in the darkness for the pocket where the flask was located. Now she had to silently undo yet another zipper, and then she pulled out the flask and gently rested back on top of the sleeping bag.

Drinking alcohol was something that Kate had rarely done, and despite her age, she had never had more than two drinks at a time. All that she knew was that the first sip from the flask earlier in the evening had made her feel just a little more relaxed at the moment. It only made sense that having more of the bourbon would be beneficial to her.

She sat in the darkness sipping slowly from the flask. She really had no concept of time, for she could not clearly see the face of her watch in the darkness, and she didn't want to press the little button that would have made it glow and possibly disturb Silas's slumber.

Time passed, and the flask was gradually relieved of its contents, until two thirds of the bourbon was gone, gone into the blood stream of the novice drinker. And that was when she began to feel ravenously hungry.

She found one of the energy bars Silas had given her, and she unwrapped it and relished the peanut butter flavor. She enjoyed it so much that she quickly opened the other bar and took half of the bar into her mouth in one voracious chomp.

It was cherry flavored, and she hated anything that was cherry flavored. She spat the vile and sticky mess into her hand, squeezed the rest of the bar into the glob, then opened the zipper to the front flap and tossed the whole thing outside.

She decided that there was one way to wash the horrid taste from her mouth, so she took another hearty swig of the bourbon before putting the cap back on. Then she fell suddenly asleep, her head dangling between the knees that were raised almost to her chest. Sitting there in her bra and panties, she was not even wakened by the cool night air that made its way through the tent flap that she had not closed.

What did wake her up a little later was the sound of a low, rumbling growl. And what woke the more

soundly asleep Silas was a scream followed by a rifle blast and being bonked on the head by the butt of the rifle that had flown out of the hands of the woman who had no concept of firearm recoil.

In a millisecond, the startled Silas picked up the rifle and chambered another round, while the barely dressed Kate tried to hide her head inside the sleeping bag. His eyes finally focusing from sleep, Silas saw the hindquarters of the grizzly bear lumbering away, obviously frightened by the sound of the gun blast.

He quickly crawled out the front of the tent, and as he looked around he could see churned up soil two feet in front of the tent, where the gun had fired into the ground. At least there would not be an angry wounded bear to cope with. He picked up a couple of large logs and put them on the dying fire and made it burn more brilliant so that he could better search the immediate area.

He walked to the side of the fire, and that was when he stepped in the gooey mess that had been the cherry flavored energy bar. He pulled the wet and gummy mass from the bottom of his bare foot, and carried it over to the light of the fire to verify what he had stepped in.

He took a deep breath, shook his head and began to patrol the immediate area with his rifle ready. He searched for several minutes, and when he was satisfied that the bear had fled the scene, he went back to the fire, put several more larger pieces on to help persuade wildlife to stay away, then stopped outside of the tent.

"Oh, Kate... I need you to come out here."

A meek voice responded. "Si... Si... Siiilashhh... I... sh... sh... shot a bear."

Silas ejected the cartridge from the rifle, sighed deeply and shook his head. "Kate... I need you to come out here. You did not... shoot a bear. You missed. But I want you to come out here, right now."

Suddenly, he heard Kate sobbing. "I'm glad he's okay. He was probably a really nice b... b... animal kind of person."

He stepped toward the front of the tent, knelt down and stuck his head in, greeted by the aroma of bourbon. "How much of my bourbon did you drink?"

Kate began to giggle uncontrollably. "Not so much that I couldn't sh... sh... fire a gun."

Silas backed out of the tent and stood up. "Kate... I want you out here right now."

The response was another round of giggling. "I can't. I'm almost b... b... bare."

He leaned his head down and rubbed his forehead with his fingertips. "It's just you and me, now come out here."

He heard her laughing hysterically. "Noooo... I can't bear letting a bear seeing me this bare!" More uncontrollable laughing followed.

Something suddenly came over Silas. Now, he was having to fight the laughter from emerging inside of him. "Kate! Out! Now!"

Finally, he heard a slow and mournful response... "Oh, okay, keep your pants on." Then there was more giggling. "Oops... I'm not wearing any pants, now am I?"

A moment later, Kate came crawling slowly on her hands and knees out of the tent, a strangely

enchancing vision in her bra and panties, illuminated by the campfire light. Silas reached down and took her by the shoulders and stood her up, although she nearly tottered over right away.

He held the mangled remains of the energy bar in front of her. "And why was this thrown outside the tent?"

She looked at him with one eye cocked and the other one shut. "Because it tasted like sh... sh... I didn't like it at all. Not one little bit. When you were a k... k... kid, did you ever go out on Hallo... ween, and people would give you this awful, cheap candy that no... no... nobody really wanted, and they probably had in their basement for two years and got it out every Hallow... Hallow... October, just so they could...?"

Silas squeezed her by the shoulders and gently shook her. "Kate! What did I tell you about food outside the tent and bears?"

She put her right index finger up in the air and shook it, her mouth drawn into a circle. "Ooh yeah. Not sup... sup... supposed to do that. But I only threw that awful cherry stuff out there. The b... b... bear got here on his own."

"Kate... I don't think you understand how dangerous that could have been."

She opened her arms wide and leaned forward. "Ooh... danger... the thot plikens."

Silas crossed his arms on his chest and shook his head. "Right now, there is nothing I would enjoy more than taking you across my knees and giving you a spanking so hard and so long you wouldn't sit for a week."

Kate stepped backward and stretched her arms out wide once again and slightly bowed. "Ooh... I would... I would think the bears and buffalosauruseses would like to watch me getting sp... sp... getting my asshh... sp... sp..."

Silas leaned down so their eyes were meeting. "I think you are trying to say... spanked."

She straightened up and burst into laughter. "Thash right Siilaaashhh... sp... sp... a asshhh whoopin'."

Silas leaned his head back as he rubbed his temples with his fingertips and sighed. "Oh, my gosh!"

Kate suddenly turned sideways, lowered her panties, bent over and placed her hands on her knees. "Well, Mr. Montana, you just go right ahead. In fact, I inv... inv... invite you to give me a good sp... sp...just go ahead and smack my ch... ch... chubby, freckled ashhh all that you want."

Silas stepped over, yanked up her panties, once again gripped her firmly by the shoulders and looked her directly in the eyes. "Well, since you seem to be in agreement about this, that's exactly what I'm going to do."

She shook a finger at him. "Be... because Kate... thaaasss me by the way... has been a very b... b... bad g... girl."

He squeezed her shoulders more firmly. "But we're going to wait until the morning when you are sober and can really appreciate it. And to be very honest with you, Kate, I can't wait to do it. Now get back inside the tent and get in that sleeping bag and try to get some rest and sober up."

He turned her around and propelled her toward the tent with a hard slap to her bottom, only causing her to laugh and wiggle her behind and wave at him over her shoulder as she knelt down and crawled back inside the tent.

Silas stood outside for a few minutes, looking up at the starry sky, wondering how all this had really come to pass. But despite everything that had happened, the stars were bright and the outlines of the trees in the mountains surrounding him were nothing but breathtaking.

He glanced toward the tent where this incredibly confusing but bewitching being was probably now passed out in a stupor once again. To his amazement, there was really not any anger to be felt. He simply shook his head and laughed as he made his way back inside the tent, to rest in preparation for what he truly intended to be a memorable morning.

All he could think of was the goofy expressions and mannerisms provided by her intoxication. And something told him that if she would simply allow herself to do so, she would probably be just as entertaining and funny sober. But sober or inebriated, there was just something about Kate, aside from her physical beauty, that had suddenly seized upon him. And since she had not been injured in her accident, it was the first moment that he felt happy that she had walked into his camp.

Although he was a deep sleeper, Silas could not help but be stirred in the middle of the night by the motions and surreal spectacle of the still barely dressed Kate scrambling out of the tent in the dark. He could hear rapid footsteps, then closed his eyes and winced as he heard the distant sounds of her stomach ridding itself of its contents thanks to her overindulgence of bourbon.

He pretended to stay asleep as he heard the footsteps slowly return, then listened to the sounds as she pulled the rustling jeans back on and the slight whisper of sound as she put her blouse back in place. Then he heard her lay down and moan softly.

He felt a crazy set of conflicting emotions. On one hand, he wanted to roll over and draw her into his arms and hold her tightly to help her recover. On the other hand, he wanted to right then and there pull her across his knees, yank down her jeans and spank her until the sun rose.

He almost chuckled out loud at his own thoughts as he decided it was best to do neither at the moment. The only thing he knew for certain was that he had no intention of allowing this woman to leave his life as abruptly as she had entered it.

He rose first in the morning, seeing that she was still soundly asleep. Assuming she would be in that condition for a while, he walked to the stream, stripped off his clothes and allowed the very cool water to refresh him. He had not brought a towel, and he walked along the bank and fished, catching a couple of trout and releasing them, while the very gentle breeze in the rapidly warming morning dried him quickly.

He put back on the same clothes, not wanting to take a chance on startling Kate by finding a large naked man fetching clothing next to her in the tent. He smiled to himself as he considered that the morning was already going to be one she would never forget.

A half hour after he had gotten dressed, he saw the flap of the tent open, and Kate crawled out slowly, rubbing her eyes, stumbling somewhat when she stood up. He walked over just as she dropped her hands, and she caught her breath at seeing him.

She closed her eyes and placed her fingertips to her temples. "Silas... I don't know what to say."

He stepped closer, placed his index finger beneath her chin and raised her gaze to look at him, a smirk on his face she found quite unsettling, and she remembered why. "So, Kate, do you remember what you agreed was to take place this morning?"

Her face turned a shade of red he had never witnessed before as she looked down and nodded. "Yes, dammit, I remember. But right now, I'm still so hungover and groggy..." In an instant, she had not only been picked up, but the powerful, large man was holding her over his head as he stepped toward the stream, paying no heed to her screams of protest.

Her screams took on another tone entirely when she landed in the water in the same pool he had threatened to toss her into when she had thrown her tantrum upon their meeting. As she sputtered and thrashed in the water that was just chest high for her, Silas stepped closer and smiled. "Still as groggy? Or are you more wide-awake now and ready for me to fulfill my promise to give you what you need?"

Her eyes at first popped open widely as part of a defiant expression, then she suddenly allowed her angry glare to melt into a sigh of acceptance. "Okay, but I don't have any other clothes to put on."

Silas pointed toward a stand of bushes along the bank next to where she was tossed in. "I'll go get you something. You just put your clothes in a pile there, and we will let them dry over the fire." As he walked back to the tent, he did not see her close her eyes and shake her head, her former anger now replaced by a combination of embarrassment over what was about to happen and contrition for how she had behaved.

Silas returned with one of his old Marine T-shirts and draped it over one of the branches of the shrubs. He looked down to see the pile of clothing, and the not unpleasant sight of Kate holding her arms across her chest as she remained in the water. "That should fit you almost like a dress, considering our differences in height. And for that matter, that's all you're going to need for now, considering how I intend to carry out the spanking you're about to get." He was surprised at her lack of facial reaction when he said those words, so he simply turned around and took a few steps away from the stream.

He could not hear her saying anything, but he could hear the splashing as she stepped out of the water. He could only imagine the scene taking place behind him as she pulled the large T-shirt over her head. And then suddenly she was standing beside him, her face as red as her hair, holding an arm full of wet clothing, standing in silence as if awaiting instructions.

Silas simply wiggled his finger for her to follow him, trying to not concentrate on how sexy and attractive she looked in the shirt that appeared a little too much like a little black dress.

She stood and watched as he took a couple of small tree limbs from his pile of wood, picked up the hand axe that rested nearby and began to chop them to the desired height. When he ended up with two poles around five feet in length, he then used the axe to slice away the wood at one end to sharpen it.

He placed one of the poles about a foot outside his fire ring, then turned the axe over and began to pound it down into the ground, then did so on the other side of the fire ring. He disappeared into the tent for a moment and she could hear him rustling inside his backpack, and when he returned he had a coil of small rope.

He tied the rope to extend between the two poles, then turned to Kate and displayed his empty

hands to ask for her clothing. She then stood back in total self-consciousness as she watched him drape her blue jeans and then her blouse over the small fire he had rekindled before she got out of bed, then felt her face flush as he looked at her and winked and cleared his throat dramatically and loudly when he placed her bra and panties over the rope.

The lightweight folding stool was still sitting along the riverbank where Kate had rested the evening before while watching him fish. He walked over slowly and picked it up, held it up and crooked his finger at her. "And now, Kate, the moment is upon us."
